

**Written Testimony of
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**Before the
New Jersey Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee
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Good Afternoon, Committee Chair Weinberg, Vice Chair Vitale, and members of the Committee.

My name is Emily Littman and I am Director of the Mayors Wellness Campaign.

Thank you so much for inviting the Mayors Wellness Campaign to participate in this important hearing. And thank you for helping to bring some much needed attention to one of the most important public health issues facing our state and nation, obesity prevention.

The Centers for Disease Control has said that the next generation of Americans, as represented by our children, may very well be the very first generation of Americans to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. The cause of that tragic statement is singular: the obesity epidemic.

The Mayors Wellness Campaign (MWC) is an initiative of the New Jersey Health Care Quality Institute in partnership with the New Jersey State League of Municipalities. Our effort was launched in 2005 following the Institute of Medicine's groundbreaking report "Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance." That report recommended that:

Local governments, public health agencies, schools, and community organizations should collaboratively develop and promote programs that encourage healthful eating behaviors and regular physical activity, particularly for high-risk populations.

We believed that that "collaboration" was best achieved by engaging the CEO's of local governments in New Jersey - Mayors.

The MWC supports mayors as champions of community health. Our goal is to increase opportunities for New Jersey residents to participate in daily physical activity with a long-term goal of reducing health care costs secondary to obesity. Through public-private partnerships, we provide the structure and resources for healthy community initiatives. And by encouraging mayors to play a leadership role in supporting local opportunities for active, healthy lifestyles, the intent of the MWC

is to improve health and make New Jersey a national leader in community-based health interventions.

I am pleased to appear before you today and announce that more than 300 of the state's 566 municipalities (more than half) are now participating in the Mayors Wellness Campaign, five years after our launch.

So just what are these mayors doing?

The answer is as diverse as the communities which make up our state.

- Some are sponsoring dances with seniors.
- Some are making it easier for children to walk to school.
- Some are participating in the "Mayors Healthy Cook-offs" that we sponsor.
- Others have engaged in our own version of "The Biggest Loser" - our "Toxic Waistlines" competitions.
- Still others have encouraged their local restaurants to add a "Mayors Healthy Choice" to their menu. And scores and scores of other ideas.

In fact, I would encourage the members of the committee to take what I call "the Google challenge": simply enter "Mayors Wellness Campaign" in the search field and you will find dozens of pages of unique stories, blogs, photographs and websites dedicated to local Mayors Wellness Campaign efforts.

Recently, we were thrilled when mayors in Tennessee asked if they could replicate our effort. We, of course, enthusiastically said "Yes."

Today, before this committee, I am most pleased to be able to announce for the first time that we will soon be naming two additional "New Jersey Healthy Towns." One of them, Fair Lawn, is in Senator Gordon's district and the other is Upper Saddle River. They join Bridgewater, Clifton, Hamilton Township (Mercer County), Hillsborough, Madison, Nutley, Parsippany, and Woodbridge bringing to 10 the number of communities which have earned this prized designation.

We are proud of these towns and so many others where local Mayors along with community leaders are making a real difference in the overall health of our communities.

Furthermore, the Mayors Wellness Campaign is eager to partner with the Legislature in this important effort and continue our collaboration with those

testifying here today. You have, of course, already taken critical steps toward addressing the obesity crisis with the 2006 “New Jersey Obesity Prevention Action Plan”. We support the creation of a Legislative Bipartisan Task Force on this issue and look forward to working with those members to provide local community leaders with the tools to develop and implement active-living initiatives with the ultimate goal of improving health and reducing the skyrocketing health care costs that come with the obesity problem in New Jersey.

Please let us know how we may assist you.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have about the Mayors Wellness Campaign.

Again, thank you, Senator Weinberg, for the opportunity to testify.